

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ICRC, AG, MO, MR
SUBJECT: ICRC PROTECTION ACTIVITIES IN CONNECTION WITH
THE WESTERN SAHARA CONFLICT.

1. INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) PRESS
RELEASE NO. 1331 ON THE ABOVE SUBJECT IS QUOTED BELOW AS
OF INTEREST TO ADDRESSEES.

QUOTE - FROM THE TIME WHEN THE CONFLICT IN THE WESTERN
SAHARA BROKE OUT, SEVERAL HUNDRED MEN ARE ESTIMATED TO
HAVE BEEN MADE PRISONER BY ONE OR THE OTHER OF THE
BELLIGERENTS. THESE CAPTIVES ARE MAINLY MEMBERS OF THE
ROYAL MOROCCAN ARMED FORCES AND OF THE MAURITANIAN ARMED
FORCES, COMBATANTS BELONGING TO THE POLISARIO FRONT AND
MEMBERS OF THE ALGERIAN ARMED FORCES. IN DECEMBER 1975,
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC)
APPROACHED THE VARIOUS PARTIES CONCERNED AND OFFERED ITS
SERVICES TO ENSURE THAT ITS TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES OF
PROTECTION WOULD BE CARRIED OUT FOR ALL PRISONERS.

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2. UNTIL THE END OF 1977, THOSE STEPS HAD PRODUCED ONLY
LIMITED RESULTS. IN DECEMBER 1975, ICRC DELEGATES VISITED
TWELVE PRISONERS HELD BY THE POLISARIO FRONT, IN SEPTEMBER
1976, THEY SAW 57 MOROCCANS AND MAURITANIANS OUT OF AN
UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF PRISONERS. IN MOROCCO, THE
DELEGATES VISITED ON THREE OCCASIONS 99 ALGERIAN SOLDIERS
HELD IN RABAT. DURING THE VISITS TO THOSE DIFFERENT

CATEGORIES OF PRISONERS, THE ICRC DELEGATES SPOKE WITH PRISONERS OF THEIR CHOICE WITHOUT WITNESSES. IN JANUARY 1976, ICRC DELEGATES SAW 63 COMBATANTS OF THE POLISARIO FRONT CAPTURED BY MAURITANIAN ARMED FORCES, AND AGAIN IN JANUARY 1977 THEY SAW 125 MORE POLISARIO COMBATANTS ALSO IN THE HANDS OF THE MAURITANIAN ARMY, BUT THEY WERE NOT ALLOWED TO SPEAK WITH THEM IN PRIVATE.

3. DEEPLY CONCERNED AT THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY ICRC DELEGATES IN HANDLING THE GRAVE HUMANITARIAN PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE CONFLICT, ICRC PRESIDENT ALEXANDRE HAY TOOK STEPS IN APRIL 1978 TO GO HIMSELF TO NORTH AFRICA, WITH THE AIM OF MEETING THE HIGH AUTHORITIES OF ALL THE PARTIES CONCERNED. AS A RESULT, THESE HIGH AUTHORITIES AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO AUTHORIZE THE DELEGATES OF THE ICRC TO CARRY OUT THEIR TASKS OF PROVIDING PROTECTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THOSE DUTIES WERE TRADITIONALLY UNDERTAKEN, IN PARTICULAR THAT THEY SHOULD VISIT ALL PRISONERS AND SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO SPEAK WITH ANY OF THEM WITHOUT WITNESSES. ACCORDINGLY IN APRIL 1978, THEY WERE GRANTED AUTHORIZATION TO VISIT 86 COMBATANTS OF THE POLISARIO FRONT CAPTURED BY THE ROYAL MOROCCAN ARMED FORCES AND IN MAY, TO VISIT 205 COMBATANTS OF THE POLISARIO FRONT HELD IN MAURITANIA.

4. ON THE OTHER HAND, DESPITE THE ASSURANCES GIVEN TO THE UNCLASSIFIED

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ICRC PRESIDENT BY POLISARIO FRONT LEADERS, THE DELEGATES HAVE STILL NOT RECEIVED TO DATE THE AUTHORIZATION TO PURSUE THEIR MISSION OF PROTECTION FOR THE WHOLE OF THE MOROCCAN AND MAURITANIAN PRISONERS. THE ICRC POINTS OUT THAT THESE PRISONERS HAVE NOT BEEN VISITED SINCE SEPTEMBER 1976 AND THAT VERY MANY FAMILIES HAVE NOT RECEIVED ANY NEWS WHATSOEVER OF THEIR MISSING RELATIVES. THE ICRC CONSEQUENTLY EXPECTS THE DETAINING AUTHORITIES TO GRANT IT FINALLY THE NECESSARY FACILITIES TO ENABLE IT TO CONDUCT ITS HUMANITARIAN MISSION, IN CONFORMITY WITH THE PROMISES MADE TO MR. HAY IN APRIL LAST. UNQUOTE.
VANDEN HEUVEL

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